

\$3.3 million in new and retained sales
\$3.5 million in new investments
71 jobs created or retained

The **Nebraska Manufacturing Extension Partnership** is a cooperative effort involving government and education based service organizations that provides business and technical services to manufacturers and processors throughout the State of Nebraska. The Nebraska MEP is a program of the Nebraska Industrial Competitiveness Alliance (NICA), a public/private partnership dedicated to providing services to Nebraska businesses.

To assure that businesses remain competitive in Nebraska, the core strategic planning and governance of two major initiatives are located with the Alliance, with administrative support from the Nebraska Department of Economic Development. Policy information is provided by cross-functional working teams of educators, labor, economic development, community colleges, postsecondary education and business representatives. NICA has standing committees for the Nebraska MEP and the Targeted Industry Program that are proving to be a powerful force in providing Nebraska's competitiveness initiatives with the passion, engagement, and developmental speed of entrepreneurial ventures. The NICA Board initiatives are unique in the nation, in that they are led by a public/private partnership.

The NICA public/private partnership calls upon the best minds and expertise available to help assess current activity and address the future. School-to-Work was NICA's vehicle for making this connection between education and work. The active involvement of employers is especially important because these initiatives must incorporate the teaching of knowledge and skills that are demanded by employers and that prepare students to be successful. NICA has increased the degree of employer involvement needed to make the system truly market-driven.

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* Impacts are based on clients receiving service in FY2009

CLIENT SUCCESS: IF YOU DARE FOODS LLC

“The Nebraska MEP Food Processing Center is the best program any entrepreneur could ever hope for! The knowledge and support from these folks is amazing, and comforting. I strongly recommend this program to anyone wanting to share their product with the world!”

Deb Beck, Owner
If You Dare Foods LLC

A Salsa Dream Come True

If You Dare Foods LLC, located in Lincoln, Nebraska produces authentic specialty salsa. The Mexican inspired salsa is made with six different types of roasted peppers and currently comes in two varieties, Flicker of Fire, a mild version, and Fire in the Hole, a more spicy variety. The company employs 20 people.

Owner Deb Beck's inspiration for the salsa business was her grandmother's homemade salsa recipe. After a few years of trial and error, Deb developed a recipe which she felt her grandmother would approve. After numerous suggestions from family and friends, Deb began selling her salsa at a local market. Although Deb had taken her first steps towards profiting from her product, she was still unsure of the steps necessary to establish a full-fledged food business. Repeated sell-outs at the farmers market induced her into formalizing the business and scaling up production to meet growing consumer demand. Deb learned of the 'From Recipe to Reality' entrepreneur seminars, the nationally recognized seminar series conducted by the Food Entrepreneur Assistance Program (FEAP, and contacted the Nebraska Manufacturing Extension Partnership (Nebraska MEP), a NIST MEP network affiliate, Food Processing Center (FPC) at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln.

Nebraska MEP's "From Recipe to Reality" is a one-day seminar designed to provide entrepreneurs with an understanding of the key business and technical issues they will need to consider when starting a food business. This seminar is phase one of the nationally recognized Food Entrepreneur Assistance Program. Following the seminar, Deb chose to proceed to the second phase of the program, "From Product to Profit". During this phase Deb received comprehensive one-on-one assistance in the development of her products and company from business development consultants and food scientists at The Food Processing Center. Specific assistance included product re-formulation for large-scale production, testing pH levels, finding and securing a contract manufacturer, obtaining liability insurance, preparation of U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) required technical information for the product label, and development of promotional materials.

At the outset, Deb and a friend did the processing and packaging in addition to all other aspects of the business. Since the commercial kitchen they utilized was in use during the day, production often occurred late into the evening. "Once we started selling the salsa, we got to the point that we couldn't keep up with the demand," said Deb. Once again Deb turned to the Nebraska MEP FPC for assistance in locating a contract manufacturer. Working with Nebraska MEP, Deb identified a contract manufacturer who agreed to produce her salsa. Shortly after Deb signed on with the co-packer, she received a call from the company saying they would not be able to produce her product as they were changing the focus of their business. Nebraska MEP stepped in and located another contract manufacturer, Original Juan of Kansas City, KS. Original Juan undertook a test batch and eventually agreed to begin preparing and packaging 'If You Dare' salsa. With guidance from Gifford and her team at Nebraska MEP's FPC, Beck applied for a UPC code, worked with a lawyer to get her trademark registered, obtained insurance, retained a graphic artist, and completed other tasks necessary to establish the business. At this stage, technical staff at the FPC provided assistance with developing nutritional labels for Beck's products. With assistance from Nebraska MEP, she began selling her products online and has successfully expanded her home-based business.

Created 2 new jobs

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